

APPENDIX A: CONSENSUS PLAN

The Mayor appointed the Newton Centre Task Force in April 2005. Its original 25 members and several additional participants have been working since then to produce this report. Initially, the Task Force was divided into six subcommittees: Case Studies; Design; Financing; Parking and Traffic; Property Use and Zoning. Each of these subcommittees researched background information and the existing conditions of the Centre. The Task Force used much of the information collected during this phase of the process to help shape its final recommendations. (The subcommittee reports have been included in the appendix in their entirety.)

After this initial phase of research, the Task Force expanded its membership to include interested members of the public and embarked on the second phase of the process: visioning. In this phase, the Task Force re-divided itself into three, self-selected groups to explore different visions for the future of the Centre. When each of these groups presented their plans at a public forum in October 2006, it became clear that there were several areas of agreement among the three plans. The group chairs subsequently met and the Task Force members agreed to recommend the "Improvement Plan" for Newton Centre that described below.

For any village center of neighborhood improvement to be successful, it is critical that there be some common principles upon which most, or all, key constituencies agree. These common values then become the underpinning for key strategic objectives that have sufficient broad based support to assure action and follow through on individual initiatives ranging from cleanup and garbage collection to public investment in parks and infrastructure, to guidelines for renovation and new development.

In the well-established village of Newton Centre, there may be differences of opinion on specific uses and building densities, but there is a shared vision of a vibrant village center that serves both the surrounding village neighborhood and the broader city. There is also broad-based agreement that to remain the vibrant village center it has been and is will require continued diligence by the entire community of merchants, residents, property owners and elected representatives.

In the face of increased traffic, changing shopping patterns, and changing neighborhood needs, the community will need to make sure that the Centre continues to capitalize on its easy access to public transit, its attractive setting and mix of public and private uses, its surrounding residential areas and parks, and its convenient parking and pedestrian circulation. Detailed studies of these problems and needs have been completed and there continues to be disagreement on development objectives. However, the three different subcommittees and the overall Task Force have now come together around four key Improvement Plan Objectives:

1. Reinforce the "village" heritage, scale and character.

Newton Centre has been a gathering place since the 18th century. But it has not been Newton's

- first, oldest or biggest settlement
- economic "downtown"
- seat of government

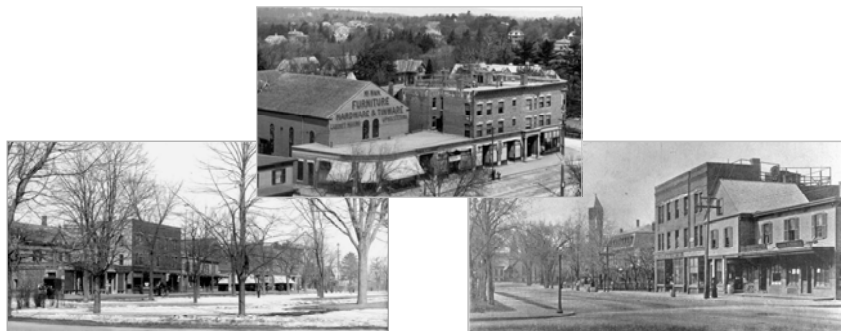
In 1714, a surveyor declared the intersection of Homer and Centre Streets to be Newton's geographic "center," so the new meeting house was built there.

For the first half of the 19th century, one source says the area was known as "Saints' Rest," because it was dominated by churches and the hilltop Newton Theological seminary.

The clear population centers (or "villages") in 1831 were Newton Corner, Watertown Street, West Newton, and Upper and Lower Falls. In 1831, there was no Beacon St. (or Chestnut Street or Walnut St.). Newton Centre still had many churches but relatively few houses. However, it had also become a stop on a new rail line, which hinted at major changes to come.

Starting in the 1880s and continuing into the early 20th century, railroad commuters remade Newton Centre. It became a week-round community, where new homes and shops - and even more churches - were clustered together within walking distance of the train station. Many of the commercial buildings and workshops were three or four stories tall - about the same height as many of the new Victorian and Queen Anne homes being built for railroad commuters.

The remaking of Newton Centre as a railroad suburb involved both market forces and conscious planning. By 1920, in addition to churches, stores, and homes, new public buildings and parks filled and surrounded the intersections of Beacon, Centre, Langley and Union Streets.



commercial buildings on Centre Street, facing the common, 1890-1905¹

In the 1920s, automobile drivers began to overtake railroad passengers in shaping the next wave of major change in Newton Centre. The Depression and World War II delayed their biggest impact until the 1950s: a 1946 aerial view of Newton Centre still looked remarkably like similar views from the 1890s.

¹ Images from the collections of the Newton History Museum, 527 Washington St., Newton, MA 02458



1897 artists view of Newton Centre

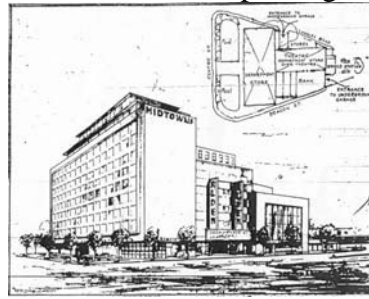


1946 aerial view of Newton Centre

By the 1950s, however, shoppers clearly preferred driving rather than walking from store to store. As older commercial buildings were replaced, the new buildings often had only one or two stories, and the merchants joined their customers in pressing for more parking spaces and lots. Parents campaigned successfully to replace the old school in the "center of the Centre" with a new, modern school "at the edge of the center," at the southern side of the Newton Centre Playground. The old school site was re-used for parking.



Mason School, built in the triangle in the 1890s



a building proposed but never built on the site of the old Mason School

In the early 21st century, Newton Centre still has layers from all these historical periods:

- in the oldest layer, churches (or at least church sites) and roads that brought people to and from church once a week in the 18th and early 19th century
- in the middle layer, a rail line, homes and commercial buildings from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, clustered within walking distance of the train station to meet the needs of daily railroad commuters
- in the newest layer, commercial buildings, parking lots, and widened streets and intersections, all designed to meet the needs of automobiles and their drivers

After considerable discussion on the meaning of "village" and "community" relative to "downtown," there is now general agreement that Newton Centre is a successful village center that needs to bring the neighborhood community together and provide a diverse range of uses, activities and experiences at a pedestrian and neighborhood scale consistent with the center's heritage over the last 100 years.

- 2. Significantly improve the pedestrian experience throughout the centre.** After significant analysis and debate about the needs and conflicts associated with vehicular, public transit, and pedestrian access, facilities, and amenities, there is now general agreement that the pedestrian experience needs to be accorded a much higher priority in future plans and improvements in the center. The key objective here is to make the entire center more pedestrian friendly and safe and to improve pedestrian connections to public transit while reducing conflicts with vehicular traffic and parking. (illustrate with photo of narrow cluttered Newton Centre sidewalks and wider sidewalks and plazas in Newton Highlands)



- 3. Expand and augment the open space experience in the village centre.** While there are large amounts of open space near the village centre, there is also strong agreement that these spaces are not very well connected, focused or programmed. The most critical link and focus of this open space network is the Newton Centre and Beacon/Union Street Triangles in the middle of Newton Centre and all groups agreed on the objective of removing all of the parking from the Triangle and replacing it with a mix of more pedestrian-oriented active and attractive open space uses and activities.



Today the triangle is a parking lot... tomorrow, it could be open space.

- 4. Enhance the mix of public and private uses that make the Centre so attractive.** There is widespread concern that the current dynamics of the private marketplace has resulted in the loss of a number of uses considered to be desirable to the continued vitality and diversity of the Centre (especially the loss of neighborhood retail uses and their replacement by offices and services). The key objective here is to encourage the return of residential uses above ground floor retail and to use public facilities and spaces if necessary to support produce stores, newspaper and magazine stands and similar uses to the Centre along with the special events and activities like farmer's markets, arts and craft shows, ice skating, etc.



In the context of these four objectives, the Newton Centre Task Force has agreed upon five principal improvement recommendations and an overarching recommendation on Financing and Community Involvement going forward:

Recommendation 1: Enrich the pedestrian experience of the entire village center through enhancements that will improve the streetscapes, provide better and safer connections within the Centre and to surrounding areas and interior blocks.

The Task Force is in support of a program of physical improvements that includes the installation of attractive street furniture, landscaping, and trash receptacles (with special attention given to the provision for continued maintenance), improved lighting, signage and undergrounding of utilities (especially along Langley and the north side of Beacon where no work has been done), widening and improving of sidewalk paving and raised sidewalk crossings (especially in connection with the reconfiguration of parking that is recommended below). There was strong agreement that any traffic and parking improvement plans should be integrated with these activities to ensure that pedestrian safety, mobility, and amenity remains the top priority.

Sidewalk widths, light fixtures, street furniture and landscape treatments vary greatly throughout the Centre. All of these elements contribute to the overall pedestrian experience. To improve this experience, the City should establish Design Guidelines for Public Improvements. Implementing these Guidelines will direct future public improvements, to ensure a more cohesive, attractive, pedestrian-friendly Newton Centre.

The Design Guidelines should include recommendations on the design of streets, sidewalks, open space, parking areas, and landscape as well as on the procurement and placement of street furniture, light fixtures, public signage and sidewalk materials. They should not recommend that the streetscape in the Centre should be completely uniform, but instead should propose general standards that apply to the entire Centre as well as more detailed guidelines for specific areas.

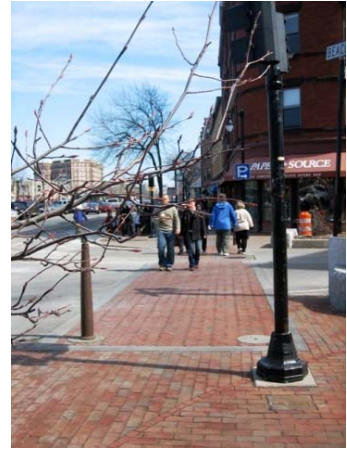
1. GENERAL GUIDELINES, *to be followed throughout Newton Centre*

1A. Streets and Sidewalks: *Well-designed streets and sidewalks are vital to the success of Newton Centre. While it is important to preserve ease of vehicular movement, particularly along Beacon and Centre Streets, Newton Centre is also a destination point and the heart of a residential community. It should be a place where people feel they can easily walk between businesses, parks and shops. Street and sidewalk design should support the objective of making a pedestrian oriented environment. Roads,*



particularly the wider Centre and Beacon Streets should be safe and easy to cross.

- Build neck-downs (bumped out sidewalks) at all corners of all streets lined with parking spaces to shorten the distance that pedestrians have to cross the road.
- Consolidate pedestrian crosswalks, and mark them with concrete pavers, brick, paint or other special paving. Coordinate the design of the crosswalks with the design of the sidewalks.
- Build 10'-wide raised treed medians along Centre and Beacon Streets to give pedestrians a safe halfway stopping point. Medians also indicate to drivers that they are entering a special place.
- Sidewalk widths will vary from street to street, but shall use a consistent palette of materials and design treatments. Possible paving and curbing materials include Stiles & Hart Boston City Hall paving brick, and Chelmsford Grey Granite.
- Place utilities underground throughout the Centre.



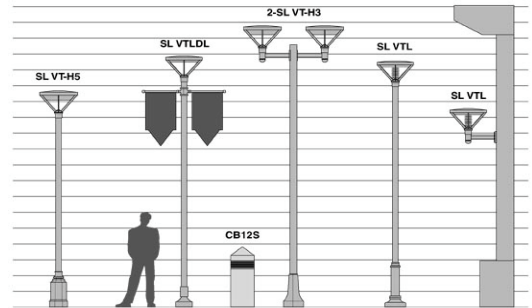
1B. Pedestrian Walkways and Alleys: *Pedestrian Walkways and alleys provide smaller scale routes for pedestrians to navigate the Centre. They should be well lit, safe, and pleasant.*

- Pedestrian walkways and alleys shall be constructed of the same palette of materials as the street sidewalks in Newton Centre. Their design shall incorporate the same light fixtures that are used throughout the Centre. Plantings and street furnishings shall be added wherever possible.
- Sidewalks and entryways shall be added behind those buildings that provide rear public access. These walks and entryways shall be constructed of the same materials as sidewalks along streets.



1C. Lighting: *In addition to providing security, decorative light fixtures help to establish the character of Newton Centre.*

- Use pedestrian-scale light fixtures 10'-14' high, of a simple design that can accommodate arms for planters and banners. Locate fixtures at regular intervals not greater than 70' apart.
- Light fixtures shall meet "Dark Sky" requirements.



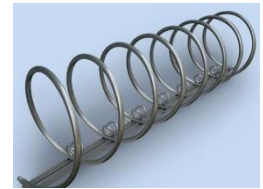
1D. Street Furnishings: *Street furnishings - benches, trash receptacles, planters, bollards, newspaper dispensers, bicycle racks, tree grates and directional signage - combine with light fixtures to define the character of a particular place. They furnish a space and invite pedestrian involvement. The style and color of all street furnishings shall be coordinated. All shall be durable and easy to maintain.*



- **Benches** shall be located so that they encourage the enjoyment of specific spaces, whether along sidewalks or in parks. They may face quieter streets to facilitate people-watching, face away from busy streets, or face each other to encourage conversation. They shall be located outside restaurants to provide places for outdoor eating, or in parks to provide places for quiet reading or contemplation.



- **Trash receptacles** shall be installed at regular intervals along streets, at key intersections, close to (but downwind of) groups of benches.. Coordinate the style of the trash receptacle with the style of the bench. Trash receptacles shall be located a maximum of 60' apart.



- **Bike racks** reduce car traffic and parking demands by encouraging people to bike to the Centre rather than drive. Locate bike racks at transportation nodes (i.e., the T-Stop), convenient locations, and public facilities. Coordinate the style of the bicycle racks with benches and trash receptacles.



- **Newspapers** should all be in one location – as in Newton Highlands not scattered throughout the village. –

- **Public Signage:** Clear, consistent, attractive and coordinated signage shall be located throughout the Centre. Directional signs shall be located to help visitors find parking and particular stores and services. Interpretive signs explaining the history of the area shall be mounted in appropriate areas. They can also be combined with orientation maps and community event information. Historic plaques shall be mounted on structures of historic or cultural interest.

- **Public Art** shall be incorporated into the streetscape design. Examples of this technique could include small water features, sculptures, benches, decorative pavings, flagpoles, murals & clocks.



1E. Street Trees: Street trees enrich the appearance and health of an urban environment. Trees shade the streets, sidewalks and buildings, mediate the scale between taller buildings and pedestrians, reduce noise and pollution, and provide shelter for pedestrians.



- Trees shall be planted at consistent intervals along the streets to establish a rhythm and an aesthetic identity to the various areas of Newton Centre. Spacing should be between 20' minimum and 40' maximum, depending on the type of street and the width of the tree canopy. On wide streets with ample sidewalks, large shade trees with high canopies shall be spaced approximately 30' apart. On narrow streets with narrow sidewalks, small trees with narrow canopies shall be spaced approximately 20-25' apart.
- Current technology for tree planting (i.e. structural soil) shall be instituted for trees planted in sidewalks.

In addition to the General Guidelines that apply to the entire Centre, we identified five distinct areas in Newton Centre, each of which needs specific design standards. These areas are Langley Road and Union Street (Low Traffic Streets), Beacon and Centre Streets (High Traffic Streets), the Triangle, Parking Areas, and Open Space. We recognize the unique function of each of these areas and acknowledge that site elements used in one area may not be entirely appropriate in another area.

2. UNION STREET AND LANGLEY ROAD (LOW TRAFFIC STREETS) *Partly due to their one-way vehicular traffic flow, and the shops and restaurants on both Union Street and Langley Road, these streets are currently two of the most pedestrian-friendly streets in the Centre. The goal of these Guidelines is to further enhance their enjoyable character.*

- Streets shall be curbsless and paved with decorative pavers to enable their occasional use as a pedestrian mall.
- Sidewalks shall be a minimum of 15'-wide to accommodate outdoor cafes, benches and plantings.
- Along with street trees, street furnishings and light fixtures, decorative flower planters or barrels shall define the street



edge and lend the areas a unique identity.

- Flower baskets shall be hung from light poles, to provide color and identity.
- Bench locations shall be a maximum of 40' apart.

3. BEACON AND CENTRE STREETS

(HIGH TRAFFIC STREETS) *Beacon and Centre Streets carry the most regional traffic flow throughout the Newton Centre. While it is important to facilitate this flow, drivers should also be signaled that they are entering a town center.*



- A 10-wide treed median strip underplanted with ground cover shall be added along Centre Street, from Willow Street to Cypress Street, and along Beacon Street from Chesley Road to Centre Street. The median will serve to establish the identity of Newton Centre, and indicate to drivers that they have arrived at a populated center of activity. By dividing the street, the median visually makes the road appear less wide. It will also make it safer for pedestrians to cross.
- The median curb shall be granite and 12 inches high.
- Sidewalks shall be at least 10 feet wide to accommodate pedestrian traffic flow in two directions, window shoppers and a row of trees along the street edge. The branches shall be cut a minimum of 8 feet above the ground to provide adequate clearance and so as not to obscure the building facades and business signs.
- Banners may be hung from light poles.
- Bench locations shall be a maximum of 70' apart.

4. TRIANGLE *The Triangle should pulse with activities that attract visitors year-round, including meeting friends, shopping, dining, or watching a concert. The pathways within the Triangle serve as arteries carrying pedestrians –safely from one activity to the next both within the Triangle and in the surrounding commercial areas.*



- Perimeter sidewalks along Centre Street shall be 10' wide.
- All other perimeter sidewalks shall be 5' wide.

- Pedestrian pathways within the park will vary in width.



5. PARKING AREAS *well-landscaped and lighted parking lots can enhance a visitor's experience of Newton Centre*

- Parking lots must meet or exceed landscaping requirements in the Zoning Ordinance §30-19.
- Provide a 4'-wide minimum perimeter of planting between a parking lot and a street or public way. A low decorative fence or wall may also be used. Woven wire fencing (i.e. chain link) may not be used.
- Provide sidewalks to safely move people from parking areas to businesses.
- Light fixtures shall match those fixtures used throughout Newton Centre, and shall be located closely enough to ensure visibility without glare into adjoining properties.
- Ecologically designed drainage swales are highly recommended.



6. PARKS AND OPEN SPACES *offer a respite from buildings and traffic. They offer a meeting ground for residents and visitors, an open space for community celebrations and events, a quiet bench for lunch, or a garden to enjoy.*

- Strengthen the connection of Newton Centre with the Newton Centre Playground. Coordinate light fixtures,



street trees, trash receptacles, and benches. Particularly enhance the edge of the Playground along Centre Street, as it marks the entrance to Newton Centre from the north. Build a well-marked crosswalk across Centre Street at Tyler Terrace to enable safe pedestrian passage across the street

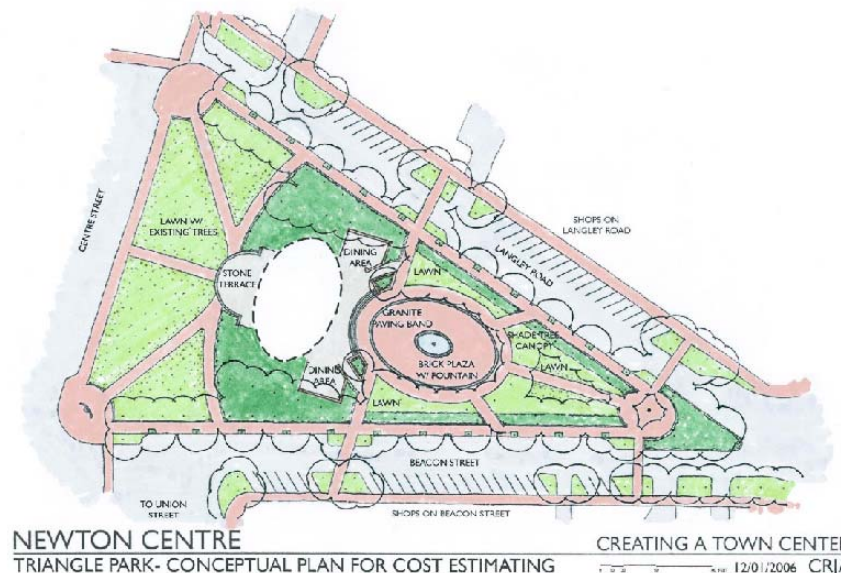
- Design seating and plantings to take advantage of sun orientation, to protect from winds, and create a variety of inviting and comfortable spaces.

Plant a variety of large trees, small flowering trees, shrubs and perennials throughout Newton Centre's open spaces.

Finally, the Task Force also recommends that Public Sector Improvements shall be phased to minimize disruption to current businesses, residents and visitors to the Centre.

Recommendation 2: Reinvent and revitalize the Newton Centre and Beacon² Triangles in the middle of the centre as visually and socially active spaces that provide the central identity for Newton Centre.

The Task Force is committed to providing a much more attractive and socially active set of uses in the Newton Centre Triangle that provide a strong and positive identity for Newton Centre. Parking spaces in the paved parking area in the middle of the current Newton Centre triangle will be relocated to equally accessible locations on reconfigured nearby streets with diagonal parking (see below). The current green at the west end of



Sketch by Carol Johnson and Associates

this Triangle should be extended to an area of more active use. The eastern end of the Newton Centre triangle should have landscaping with outdoor seating, a fountain,

² Small triangle of open space bounded by Beacon and Union Streets and Langley Road.

plantings, and a hard surface area for other pedestrian oriented uses and events that becomes a small ice skating rink in the winter.

The Beacon Triangle should be better landscaped and include amenities such as street furniture and trash receptacles that would make it an attractive and usable space for passive recreation.

These improvements to the two triangles would be connected to landscaping and beautification improvements along adjacent streets and retail frontages. Consistent with the pedestrian improvements noted above, a strong pedestrian linkage and/or covered walkway would be created across the Newton Centre Triangle north-south between Beacon Street and Langley Road, with the potential to provide enclosed spaces or kiosks along this pedestrian way for park related ancillary uses or other uses that are not being provided for in the regular private commercial space in the centre. These general guidelines and principles are recommended by the Task Force as a foundation for a design competition for the two Triangles and the surrounding streetscape and beautification plan.

Recommendation 3: Replace the unattractive and problematic parking in the middle of the Triangle one for one with equally accessible diagonal and shared parking on other reconfigured lots and streets in the Centre.

One of the biggest challenges of the Newton Centre Task Force is to improve upon the parking and traffic conditions that exist today and to make sure any future development maintains a desirable quality of life for residents and supports the vitality as well as the history of the village center. Task Force members identified the following objectives to assure future changes to parking and circulation support these values:

- Avoid negative parking and traffic impacts of residents
- Make it easier to find parking spaces
- Maximize parking around the center
- Create more pedestrian-friendly environment
- Facilitate all modes of transportation

Below is a summary of existing conditions and recommended changes to improve upon them.

PARKING

Existing conditions

Like business owners in most places, Newton Centre merchants desire lots of parking as close as possible to their places of business so it will be easy for their customers to reach them. Because Newton Centre hosts a stop on the Green Line, commuters who live too far from the “T” to walk, may drive and park nearby. Residents who expect to enjoy quiet and safe neighborhoods often compete for parking with commuters and employees who seek free parking all day. To reconcile all these interests, the Newton Centre Task

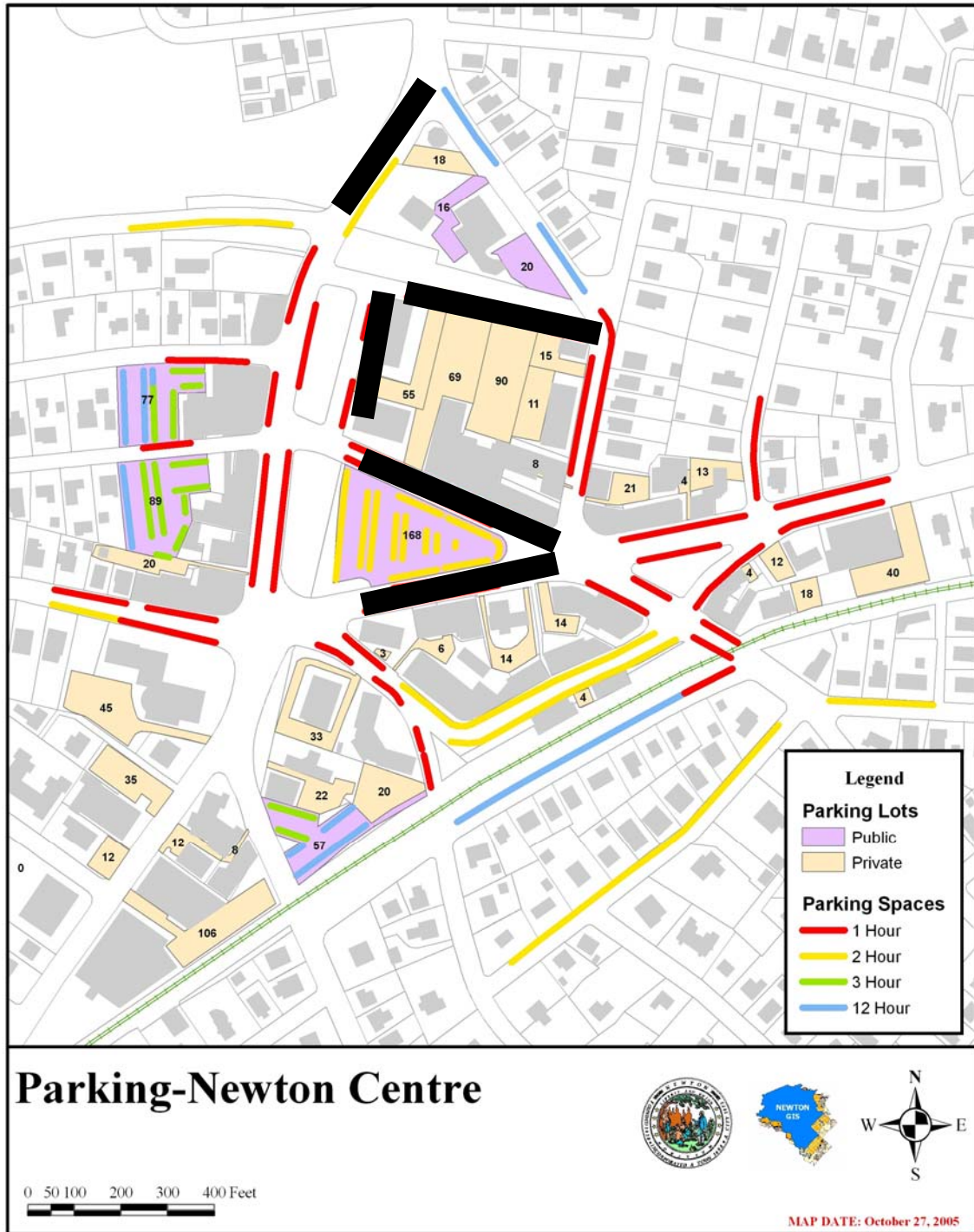
Force has sought to identify locations for convenient parking for customers while providing reasonably-priced parking for employees and a limited number of spaces for local commuters who must drive, while protecting the residential character of surrounding neighborhoods.

Parking for the Improvement Plan

The first step in realizing an Improvement Plan for Newton Centre is to relocate the existing 155 parking spaces from “The Triangle” so it can become a more attractive public space. It is important to relocate the existing parking elsewhere in the Centre because removal of parking spaces without replacement parking will increase the demand for the remaining public parking spaces. When initial data was collected in 2005, occupancy of public parking spaces in the Centre was 80% (85% is considered optimal). Removal of 155 spaces without replacement elsewhere will increase occupancy to 100% on streets adjacent to the triangle. This outcome should be avoided because it will increase traffic as more cars circle the blocks in search of spaces and could discourage patrons from visiting the center.

To relocate the spaces in “The Triangle,” the Task Force supports a strategy with two features:

Diagonal Parking. In order to create additional parking spaces on the streets, several areas have been identified in which parallel parking spaces could be converted to diagonal parking spaces. Because diagonal spaces take up less curb space than parallel spaces, replacing parallels with diagonals creates more spaces. Possible areas for conversions are shown in bold black lines on the following map and as described in the following for a total of 80-100 new spaces:



- Lyman Street. Net gain of 37-47 spaces
- Langley Road. Net gain of 14-17 spaces
- Centre Green Street. Net gain of 13 spaces.
- Beacon Street between Centre Street and Langley Road. 10 new spaces.
- Centre Street between Tyler Terrace and Gibbs Street. Gain 8-12 parallel parking spaces.

Shared Parking. For those spaces that cannot be relocated on the streets, the Task Force recommends consideration of shared parking arrangements with private property owners to encourage better use of spaces in their lots where feasible. The Task Force's initial findings indicated that many private spaces are underutilized and incorporating these spaces into the pool of available parking will improve the overall parking situation. Most of the local churches have parking available on weekdays and several offices have an oversupply of parking on weekends. Where hours or days of operation of nearby businesses are different, use of the same spaces at different times of the day offers a low-cost way to maximize available spaces.

Parking Management. Management of all available spaces is needed to assure they are used to their best advantage. Today, long-term parkers occupy many of the short-term spaces that are closest to businesses and would be best used by short-term parkers, primarily shoppers. However, all-day parkers, especially employers and their employees must compete for relatively few long-term spaces and often park in short-term spaces or in nearby neighborhoods, despite restrictions on those streets and the threat of being ticketed.

- **Placement and pricing of meters.** It is recommended that long- and short-term parking spaces be strategically placed around the village center, with the short-term spaces nearest the businesses and long-term spaces slightly farther away from the core. At the current rate of \$.25 an hour, long-term spaces are half the price of short-term spaces and will attract long-term parkers to the perimeter of the village because most people are willing to walk farther as the price declines. Drawing long-term parkers away from the most convenient short-term spaces in the core will make more spaces available for shoppers, who generally are willing to pay more for the convenience of being close to their destinations. Pricing of parking and citations will need to be adjusted periodically to encourage desired behaviors.
- **Enforcement.** Enhanced parking enforcement in the center and the surrounding residential areas is recommended to reinforce desired driver behaviors, maximize use of parking, and protect the residential character of surrounding areas.
- **Employee parking permits.** An employee parking permit program is recommended to encourage employees to park in long-term spaces. Such a program would eliminate the need for coins and provide a means for employers to help pay for employee parking.
- **Public information about parking and alternative forms of transportation.** There are a variety of ways to access Newton Centre and information about the options should be provided to merchants and the public along with maps and pricing of available parking.

It is important that the viability of proposed diagonal parking and roundabouts (see discussion of traffic below) be examined further. While it is physically possible to place diagonal parking spaces on the streets as proposed, their impact on traffic and circulation is untested. Their feasibility depends somewhat on their numbers, location and time limits proposed for the spaces. Each movement in and out of a parking space represents a

time delay for moving traffic. When there is a high volume of traffic and frequent movements in and out of spaces, the potential for delays and back-ups into intersections increases. Thus, it is essential that a professional traffic engineering study be conducted to assess the impact of diagonal parking in the various locations proposed on circulation around the center and to ensure they do not degrade existing conditions.

The Task Force is committed to assuring that adequate, accessible, convenient and safe parking remains an attractive feature of Newton Centre and is recommending that the parking currently in the Triangle be replaced with additional parking to be provided in widened diagonal configurations on Langley Road, Lyman Street, Centre Green Street and on Beacon Street and on several other adjacent streets and in more effective sharing of various parking lots near the Centre. Detailed parking improvement plans and configurations and parking management plans need to be refined but those being considered demonstrate that no additional parking structures would be needed to replace the 155 spaces being relocated from the Triangle.

The Task Force also recommends that a parking management plan be adopted that provides for improved enforcement, special provision for employee parking permits and aggressive use of shared parking options for other areas outside of the immediate Triangle area.

Recommendation 4: Continue to explore street improvements and traffic modifications that would calm and improve traffic flow in the Centre and reduce vehicle pedestrian conflicts without exacerbating through traffic or overflow traffic on neighborhood streets.

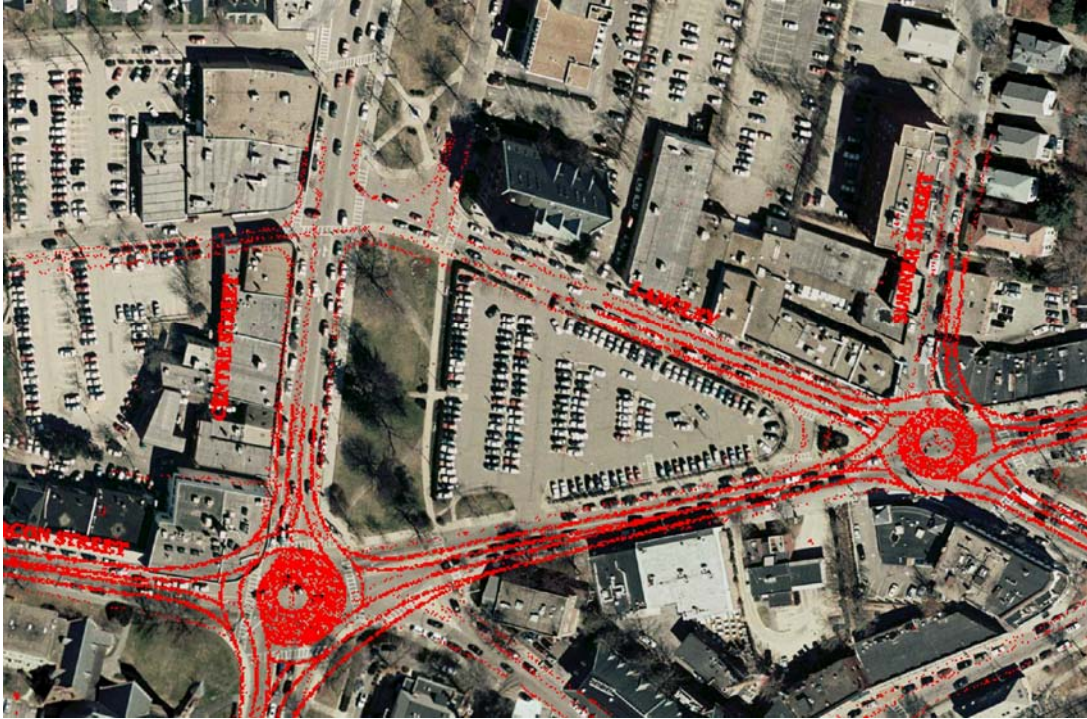
On the weekdays, traffic in Newton Centre peaks from 7:30-9:30 am and again between 4:30 and 6:30 pm. At peak times, traffic backs up at the key intersections at several locations especially on Beacon Street between Centre Street and Langley Road and also at the merger of Cypress and Centre Streets just south of the Beacon/Centre Streets intersection where traffic stacks up past Holly Cleaners at 1314 Centre Street.

From a pedestrian perspective, the existing streets are not welcoming. The wide streets that accommodate the traffic become additional barriers to a cohesive village that can be intimidating to cross at the key intersections on Beacon Street, especially at peak traffic times. Frequently, pedestrians trigger the pedestrian walk cycle on the traffic signals and cross before the signal changes if there's a break in traffic. By the time the light changes, the pedestrians are gone and vehicles are stopped in all directions for no reason. The Task Force recommends traffic calming as a way to reduce driver frustrations and protect pedestrians.

Traffic Calming

Traffic calming devices are intended to allow traffic to move freely, yet slowly. In Newton Centre, several different types are recommended. Two roundabouts are

proposed at the intersections of Beacon with Centre Street and Langley Road. Crosswalks that are raised or have a change in paving materials and bulb-outs that extend sidewalks farther into the street also are considered appropriate on the approaches to the center for signaling ones arrival in a village center and reinforcing the notion that traffic is expected to slow down and defer to pedestrians. Another visual signal is the proposal to include a landscaped center island on Centre Street. This would provide a resting place for pedestrians and reduce the distance crossed at a time by half.



Roundabouts

Roundabouts are considered traffic-calming devices because they slow traffic but do not stop it. This eliminates time delays that cause impatient drivers to divert onto side streets and increases the capacity of the roads so as to facilitate the smooth flow of traffic.

Roundabouts are smaller than rotaries and have a center island positioned so it causes cars to divert around it. In addition, the roads approaching the roundabout are curved and narrowed which slows traffic. They are considered much safer than signalized intersections because of slower speeds and because drivers are guided around the circle in one direction; this results in fewer accidents or injuries and virtually eliminates head-on collisions. The cost of installing a roundabout is generally about the same as for a signalized intersection, yet less costly to maintain because they have no signals to maintain or upgrade. Often they are attractively landscaped or designed with fountains or monuments that serve as a gateway feature and focal point for a destination.

Because they do not require traffic signals, cars stop only for pedestrians. For added protection, pedestrian-activated lights can be installed to enhance visibility of pedestrians, especially at night. Well-designed roundabouts include shorter, more visible pedestrian crossings than achievable with signalized intersections. Small islands (which can be extended into a landscaped boulevard) are provided in between the lanes of traffic and

provide a refuge for pedestrians halfway across the street. There are fewer points of conflict between pedestrians and cars compared to signalized intersections because traffic flows only in one direction and with splitter islands, pedestrians only need to observe traffic approaching from one way as they cross. They also don't have to watch for cars turning right on red lights.

Based on current pedestrian counts, existing pedestrian traffic will not cause delays in travel time or degrade the vehicular Level of Service with the proposed roundabouts. However, more extensive analysis should be done in conjunction with the parking study discussed in the preceding section.

A preliminary traffic study was done during preparation of this report. It showed that two roundabouts – at the intersections of Beacon and Centre Streets and Beacon Street and Langley Road – may be feasible, but survey data was not available at that time. The Task Force supports commissioning a professional traffic engineer to conduct a more in-depth study of these intersections as well as of the traffic patterns throughout Newton Centre.

Recommendation 5: Encourage the reconversion of non-residential space above ground floor commercial in Newton Centre back to residential use wherever feasible.



The Task Force believes that residents and residential uses in the village centre further enliven the Centre and serve other important environmental, safety, and diversity goals as well. Given that the village centre previously had a substantial number of housing units above ground floor retail that have over the years been converted to office space, and given that there is an unmet need for affordable housing for young working people and others of moderate income or wishing to downsize their homes in Newton, the Task Force supports the development of more flexible ways for property owners to meet residential parking requirements with off-site solutions.

Recommendation 6: Establish an active, empowered, and enabled Newton Centre Neighborhood and Business Improvement Organization to help guide and implement the recommended improvement programs and ongoing maintenance and preservation of the Village.

The Task Force recognizes the need for a Newton Centre Neighborhood and Business Improvement Organization to take ownership and sponsorship of the Newton Centre Improvement Plan going forward. This group should spearhead the sourcing of financing and the development of a management plan and design review process for the village centre. The capital costs of the minimum recommended improvements are estimated to be about \$6-8 million dollars for the improvements to the Triangles, the beautification and streetscape improvements of adjacent linked streets and associated traffic calming and parking improvements.

Sources of financing would include current capital improvement resources of the parks and public works departments, special CPA funds that would be matched with local fundraising and sponsorship efforts, and potential business improvement district financing and state and federal funds. This group should also develop and participate in a proactive design review process that would provide clear design guidelines for public and private improvements and development to assure preservation of the attractive village scale and character of the Centre.